PRESBYTERIANS AND God'S BUSINESS OF RECONCILIATION
II Corinthians 5:16-21
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In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself.

A remarkable and marvelous drama was played out last week before the eyes of the entire world. It spoke more about reality, about the way it is with the human condition - it contained more unvarnished truth, that is to say - than all political platforms and religious creeds combined. I refer, of course, to the [redacted]e visit of Pope John Paul II to his native Poland.

While a segment of the press concluded that the effect of the visit will be minimal - that there will be no actual loosening of the martial law imposed by Poland's military government, most thoughtful analysts were saying that the Pope had touched something profound in the nation's soul, and that nothing could ever be the same.

Listen to James Reston, for instance, in the New York Times:

> "It's not difficult to understand why the Polish government was worried about inviting the Pope of Rome to come back to his native land. He may

be more dangerous to the Communist philosophy than all the missiles of the West. . .the Pope has dominated the life of this country these past few days with his faith, his patience, and his eloquence.

Even the old walls of Warsaw echo with the sound of his voice and the music of the church. You will know that Communism has finally prevailed in Poland when it reproduces the architecture, the painting, and the hymns inspired by Poland's nationalism and religious tradition." (NYT, 6/19/83)

At a breakfast meeting this week for church and business leaders in Columbus, our new Roman Catholic Bishop, James Griffin, told the assembly that in God's eyes, and for the purposes of the church's concern there are no clear boundries between religious and secular affairs. Bishop Griffin noted how easy it is for Americans to applaud what John Paul II is doing and saying in Poland, but that it is not so easy to address poverty, injustice, and subtle forms of oppression in our own country.

In fact, it is both intriguing and disturbing to note that the two main actors in the Poland drama could be characterized as a meddling clergyman and a radical Union organizer. Neither type is popular with the mainstream of American Protestantism. In fact, neither type is ever welcome in the halls of those who hold power - regardless of the name of the system.

What the Pope is saying, by his pilgrimage, by his visits to industrial work places, by his making common cause with the labor union movement, is that all of life is the business of God: not just the way Mass is said, but the way the children of God live and move and have their being.

The world, the whole wide world is the context for God's presence, God's activity, God's mission. There are no boundries between the sacred and the secular. You cannot read the Bible at all and believe that God cares more about the way people say prayers and sing hymns than about the way justice is practiced in society.

That is what St. Paul wanted so desparately for the earliest Christians in Corinth to understand. The purpose of God's coming in the first place was not to create an isolated enclave of pious individuals dedicated to protecting their own flanks from worldly incursions, but, in his own words, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself."

The world is the context. There are no neat boundries between what matters to God and his church and what doesn't matter. The world is the context, and once we learn that difficult lesson, it is clear that in the wide context God's business is reconciliation...the bringing together of that which is separated, the healing of that which is broken apart.

The world is the context and reconciling is the mission: Christians with Christians, to be sure: and rich with poor, and black with white, and young with old, and female with male, and liberal with conservative, and East with West, and ~~individuals who are kept from learning what they~~ can ~~become with that which keeps them from~~ it.

Reconciliation is what the Christian enterprise is about and every time I think for a minute about our own ~~lusting~~ history as Presbyterians I realize that this is our genius. Since John Calvin settled in Geneva and set about reordering the entire life of that city, we Presbyterians have known that the context is the city of humanity, and the name of the business is reconciliation.

Once a year, we latter day sons and daughters of that tradition get together somewhere in the United States to think about what that means, argue fiercely, pray and sing about it and talk endlessly into the night. It is called the meeting of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. It has happened for 195 consecutive years and this year, along with 1300 other laity and clergy, a member of this church was there, in Atlanta, Jeff Hawthorne.

CONCLUSION

The early Christians began with their own feelings, their faith, their sense of their own salvation. Their teacher, Paul, helped them to see the whole picture: the fact that while they rejoiced in their own salvation, the saving of the whole world was God's business.

And then, once they had seen the length and breadth of it, they would know their own personal part of it more fully, more accurately.

So, one sees the panorama of the church on occasion, but most of one's time is spent in a particular church. And so, on occasion, one senses in one's soul the magnificent wholeness of the Christian Faith, but ultimately one comes down and home and must live within the perimeters of the particular life and believe with this particular heart and body and mind and soul.

And it is good to be reminded, finally, that God's reconciliation does include, does begin with - in fact, the reconciliation of my life, the healing of my brokenness, the redemption of my humanity.

Having seen the whole picture, it is very good to know that we are in it - that in St. Paul's good words - "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has passed away; behold the new has come." AMEN.